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UNIV. OF WISCONSIN

MAY 25 1883

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AN ACT to Authorize the Selection, Location and Appropriation of Certain Lands in the Village of Niagara Falls, for a State Reservation, and to Preserve the Scenery of the Falls of Niagara.

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—♦♦♦—  
S P E E C H  
OF  
Hon. THOMAS V. WELCH,  
OF NIAGARA,  
IN THE  
ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK,  
FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 1883.

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## S P E E C H.

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Mr. WELCH said: As the representative from the Niagara Falls district, I have no desire to take part in this discussion, and I would prefer that it be conducted by members from other sections of the State; but, during the course of the debate, statements have been made concerning the nature and the cost of this enterprise which I know to be erroneous, and uttered in misapprehension or with a desire to mislead and prejudice this Assembly. Coming, as I do, from the very locality in which it is desired to establish the reservation at Niagara, having a knowledge of all the circumstances, and being conversant with the movement since its inception, I believe it is my duty to state to the members what I know to be the true nature and probable cost of the proposed reservation at Niagara. The gentleman from Ulster endeavors to awaken opposition to this measure by asserting that it will lead to corruption and extravagance; that it will require the expenditure of an enormous sum of money, which he variously estimates from five to ten millions of dollars. I do not know from what source the gentleman derives his information, unless it be from his own excited imagination. I do know something of the locality which is sought to be reserved, having served it in a public capacity and having had frequent charge of the local assessment-rolls. It will be remembered that a map of the lands desirable for such reservation was made by the commissioners of the State survey in the year 1879.

I have asked the town clerk of the town of Niagara for a transcript from the assessment-roll of last year, showing the assessors' valuation of such lands, and I hold such transcript, with the letter of the town clerk, in my hand. This statement includes all that was recommended to be taken by the commissioners of the State survey, being Goat Isand and the adjacent islands, Prospect Point and a narrow strip of land along the rapids. Now let us see if the aggregate valuation of this property is five or ten millions of dollars, as stated by the gentleman from Ulster. The gentleman, who has undoubtedly drawn on his imagination for his figures, will be surprised to learn that the aggregate assessed value of these lands is not five or ten millions of dollars, as he has had the temerity to state; it is \$549,250—something more than one-half of one million of dollars. It may be said that the lands are not assessed at their full value, and I believe that is so; but if the members will consult the report of the State Assessors they will find Niagara among the counties said to assess at full value, and for that reason a large sum is deducted every





State are disinterested and honorable, and actuated with the purest and best motives. I have considered the subject in all its bearings, and, notwithstanding some opposition to it in the district which I represent, and which I hope reflection will remove, I feel so deeply and earnestly the necessity for the intervention of the State in this matter that if, at the risk of personal sacrifice, I feel it my duty to give it my approval as a public enterprise, I feel assured that the present Governor will appoint as commissioners to select the lands only such men as will not lead the State into unnecessary expense, will refuse to recommend any improper or extravagant outlay, and will, if necessary, confine themselves to the selection of Goat Island and the adjacent islands and Prospect Point, which of themselves would constitute the most unique and picturesque reservation in the world. During this session we passed a bill to reserve the great forests of the Adirondack region, and the public have placed upon it the seal of their approval. If no such bill were passed, fifty years hence there might not be an acre of the primeval forest in that region, so dear to every lover of nature. Years ago Niagara belonged to the State, and by every consideration that appeals to the heart of man it should have been reserved by the State for the enjoyment of the people forever. But it was not reserved, and much of the beauty of its setting has since been destroyed. It is not yet too late to restore what has been lost. Ten, twenty, fifty years hence it may be too late, and then our State, an empire within itself, that we all love for its history, for its greatness, for its liberality and for its broad humanity, will have lost its first natural attraction in the minds of all mankind. If Providence had placed Niagara in England or France, in Germany, in Italy, or in any of the great States of Europe — which send their thousands here every year to gaze upon it, — we know that the great cataract would not be permitted for a moment to be private property. It should be taken by the State at once, and held as its most precious possession. I believe the members of this Assembly will honor themselves by the passage of this bill. They will do an act of which they will be proud for the rest of their days and for which their children will feel grateful, for in this matter we surely owe a duty to posterity. I believe that if this bill becomes a law, and if its provisions are carried into effect by the coming Legislature, it will be one of the events that will make the present administration memorable by bestowing on the people of the State, the nation, the world, the privilege of communing freely and peacefully with the sublime spectacle of Niagara, which, more than any work of art, more than any patriot tombs, more than any lofty shrine, touches our better nature, subdues the passions of the human heart, and awakens within us a realization of the power and majesty of God.